

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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USMISSION USEC BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DUBLIN 1927

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, EI

SUBJ: IRISH POLITICAL MOOD GLOMY AS FALL PARLIAMENT SESSION GETS
UNDERWAY.

SUMMARY: THE MOOD IS GLOOMY AS THE IRISH PARLIAMENT RECONVENES.
THE BLEAK ECONOMIC PROSPECT AND CONTINUAL BAD NEWS FROM NORTHERN
IRELAND WILL MAKE THINGS DIFFICULT FOR THE GOVERNMENT, WHICH IS LIKELY

TO HAVE ITS MAJORITY REDUCED TO ONE AFTER A BYELECTION IN NOVEMBER.
HOWEVER, WE DO NOT EXPECT THE GOVERNMENT TO FALL EVEN THOUGH IT
MIGHT LOSE A CRUCIAL VOTE ON THE CRIMINAL LAW JURISDICTION BILL.
NORTHERN IRELAND REMAINS THE BIGGEST WORRY OF ALL, AND NEITHER
MAJOR PARTY HAS BEEN ABLE TO DEVISE ANY KIND OF POSITIVE POLICY.

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END SUMMARY

1. THE LOWER HOUSE OF THE IRISH PARLIAMEN (DAIL) OPENED OCTOBER 22, ON A RATHER GLOOMY NOTE. IT HAS NOT BEEN A GOOD YEAR, AND THE OUTLOOK FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE IS GRIM. THE BRIGHT HOPES OF EC ENTRY AND THE HOPEFUL ECONOMIC GROWTH OF THE EARLY 70'S HAS GIVEN WAY TO RECESSION, A VIRTUALLY CERTAIN GNP LOSS OF 3-4 PERCENT THIS YEAR, AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATE NOW AT 10 PERCENT, AND A FRUSTRATING DEARTH OF HOPEFUL SIGNS FROM NORTHERN IRELAND.

2. THE DAIL SESSION: THE BIGGEST SINGLE ISSUE THIS SESSION WILL BE THE CRIMINAL LAW (JURISDICTION) BILL, WHICH WILL MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO TRY PERSONS IN THE REPUBLIC WHO HAVE COMMITTED CRIMES IN NORTHERN IRELAND, AND VICE VERSA. IT IS A ROUGH SUBSTITUTE FOR EXTRADITION, WHICH IS POLITICALLY IMPOSSIBLE. THE OPPOSITION FIANNA FAIL PARTY IS GOING ALL-OUT TO DEFEAT THE MEASURE, AND THEY FIGURE THAT IF THEY DO THEY MIGHT HAVE SOME CHANCE OF BRINGING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT. IT IS DIFFICULT FOR OUTSIDERS TO UNDERSTAND THE BITTER DIVISION ON THIS ISSUE, WHICH HAS DEEP ROOTS IN IRISH HISTORY. TO OVER-SIMPLIFY, FIANNA FAIL BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT IS BEING "TOO COLLABORATIONIST" IN COOPERATING WITH HMG, ESPECIALLY SINCE HMG HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO PROVIDE ANYTHING OF WHAT IS SEEN AS THE VITAL QUID-PRO-QUO IN THE SUNNINGDALE AGREEMENT, I.E. SOME GESTURE TOWARD AN "IRISH DIMENSION" IN A NORTHERN SETTLEMENT. ON ITS SIDE THE IRISH GOVERNMENT SEES THIS MAINLY AS A LAW-AND-ORDER MEASURE AGAINST THE IRA, NOT AS ANY CONCESSION TO HMG. THE IRA IS SEEN AS A DIRECT THREAT TO THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THE DUBLIN GOVERNMENT.

3. THE LINEUP/THE BYELECTION: BECAUSE OF THE DEATH OF JUNIOR MINISTER HENRY KENNY THREE WEEKS AGO THERE WILL BE A CRUCIAL BY-ELECTION IN WEST MAYO AROUND MID-NOVEMBER. THIS TRADITIONAL FIANNA FAIL SEAT WAS WON BY KENNY (FINE GAEL) IN THE LAST ELECTION BY ONLY A .05 PERCENT PLURALITY, AND FIANNA FAIL IS CONFIDENT IT CAN SWING THE SEAT BACK -- LIFE HAS NOT BEEN GOOD FOR WEST MAYO FARMERS LATELY. IF THE OPPOSITION WINS THE SEAT THE GOVERNMENT MAJORITY IS REDUCED TO ONE, AND IT IS NOT AT ALL SURE THAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN BRING ALONG ALL ITS VOTES ON THE CRIMINAL BILL. THE JUNIOR COALITION PARTY, LABOR, IS NOT HAPPY WITH THE BILL, CONFIDENTIAL

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AND WHEN IT WAS DEBATED IN THE IRISH SENATE LAST SESSION LABOR SENATOR MICHAEL MULLEN STRENUOUSLY OPPOSED AND VOTED AGAINST IT. HOWEVER, PRACTICAL POLITICS SHOULD PREVAIL AS PRIME MINISTER (TAOISEACH) COSGRAVE CAN THREATEN A NEW ELECTION IF HE LOSES THIS VOTE, AND NO GOVERNMENT MEMBERS WANT TO FACE A NEW ELECTION DURING THE PRESENT ECONOMIC CRISIS. MEANWHILE, FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS THE MAYO FARMERS WILL BE SEEING MORE IRISH LUMINARIES AND HEARING MORE PROMISES THAN THEY USUALLY DO IN A LIFETIME.

4. IS THE GOVERNMENT IN TROUBLE?: THE GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN BLAMING (WITH SOME JUSTIFICATION) IRELAND'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ON EXTERNAL FACTORS SUCH AS THE RISE IN OIL PRICES AND THE EUROPEAN (AND EXPECIALLY UK) RECESSION, BUT THIS RINGS A BIT HOLLOW TO THE ELECTORATE WHO HAVE BEEN PROMISED GREAT THINGS ECONOMICALLY. THE OPPOSITION, HOWEVER, HAS NOT REALLY BEEN ABLE TO CAPITALIZE ON THE SITUATION VERY WELL, MAINLY OWING TO A LACK OF TALENT AND ANY CLEAR-CUT ECONOMIC PROGRAM OF ITS OWN. THE FIANNA FAIL FRONT BENCH IS RATHER WEAK COMPARED TO ITS OPPOSITES IN THE GOVERNMENT, AND OPPOSITION LEADER JACK LYNCH HAS NOT DEMONSTRATED INSPIRING LEADERSHIP. ONE PROBLEM IS THAT THE FINNA FAIL IS NOT AN IDEOLOGICALLY DEFINED PARTY IN THE EUROPEAN SENSE. AS PARTY SECRETARY BRENNAN RECENTLY TOLD THE REPORTING OFFICER: "OUR ONLY PROGRAM IS PEACEFUL REUNIFICATION OF IRELAND AND RESTORATION OF THE IRISH LANGUAGE -- OTHERWISE WE EXIST ON HISTORY AND MEMORIES." HOWEVER, FF STILL GETS OVER HALF THE VOTES IN ELECTIONS, AND FINE GAEL IS EVEN MORE TIED TO HISTORY. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT ONE-FOURTH OF THE DAIL ARE SONS OF FORMER MEMBERS. WHAT ALL THIS MEANS IS THAT WE DO NOT SEE ANY IMMEDIATE TREAT TO THE FINE GAEL HEGEMONY, UNLESS THE COALITION SOMEHOW BREAKS APART OVER THE CRIMINAL BILL. EVEN IF THE BILL IS LOST THE GOVERNMENT CAN REMAIN IN POWER BY CALLING FOR A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IMMEDIATELY AND EASILY WINNING IT BY ONE VOTE. SUCH TACTICS - REMINISCENT OF TAMMANY HALL -- ARE NORMAL HERE. HOWEVER, IF COSGRAVE FOR SOME REASON DOES GO FOR ELECTION INDICATIONS NOW ARE THAT HE WOULD LOSE BECAUSE OF THE WRETCHED STATE OF THE ECONOMY. COSGRAVE DOES NOT HAVE TO CALL AN ELECTION BEFORE 1978 AND IT IS UNLIKELY HE WILL DO SO BEFORE THE ECONOMY TURNS UP.

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

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AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DUBLIN 1927

5. SIGNIFICANCE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS: IF THE ABOVE PROGNOSTICATION PROVES CORRECT WE CAN LOOK FORWARD TO AT LEAST ANOTHER YEAR OF FOREIGN MINISTER GARRET FITZGERALD AND COMPANY, WHICH CAN ONLY BE A PLUS BOTH FOR THE EC AND FOR THE USG. ALTHOUGH IT SEEMED AT FIRST FITZGERALD WAS SOMEWHAT TOO INCLINED TO GO ALONG WITH THE FRENCH, THIS HAS NOT PROVEN TO BE THE CASE THIS YEAR. IRELAND IS USUALLY CONTENT TO SIT QUIETLY BY AND LET ITS BIGGER EC BRETHREN MOVE TOWARD AGREEMENT, AND THEN IT ALWAYS JOINS THE CONSENSUS. ONLY ON ONE OCCASION RECENTLY HAVE THE IRISH ISOLATED THEMSELVES, I.E. IN THEIR REFUSAL TO WITHDRAW THEIR AMBASSADOR TO SPAIN -- AND AT LEAST A GOOD PART OF THE REASON FOR THIS, AS IT TURNS OUT, WAS A CALCULATED MOVE TO USE AN INCIDENT WHEN IRELAND ACTUALLY HAD A GOOD CASE TO COUNTER LOCAL CRITICS WHO HAVE ACCUSED THE GOVERNMENT OF BEING TOO PASSIVE IN THE EC. FITZGERALD HAS
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ASSEMBLED A SMALL BUT HIGHLY COMPETENT STAFF, TESTED AND PROVEN DURING THE IRISH PRESIDENCY. THE OPPOSITION WOULD STILL HAVE THE STAFF - ALMOST ALL PROFESSIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS -- BUT ITS PRESUMED FOREIGN MINISTER, MICHAEL O'KENNEDY, IS CERTAINLY NOT UP TO THE CALIBRE OF FITZGERLAD. ANOTHER EFFECT OF THE LOCAL POLITICAL SITUATION WILL BE THAT IRELAND SHOULD BE MORE BUMPTIOUS AT SPEAKING UP IN THE EC ON SUCH ISSUES AS REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT. SUCH UTTERANCES WILL BE STRICTLY FOR HOME CONSUMPTION. FINANCE MINISTER RYAN'S RECENT TIRADE AGAINST THE GERMANS' BIDGET-CUTTING ATTEMPTS CERTAINLY HAD A DIRECT RELATION TO THE WEST MAYO BYELECTION.

6. THE NORTH: NORTHERN IRELAND STILL REMAINS THE BIGGEST SINGLE POLITICAL ISSUE. IN THE LAST FEW DAYS THE NONPARTISAN POLICY HAS SUFFERED SEVERE STRAINS, WITH THE OPPOSITION CHARGING THE GOVERNMENT WITH BEING TOO WOBBLY ON "EVENTUAL" REUNIFICATION, AND BOTH BACK AND FRONT BENCHERS OF FIANNA FAIL HAVE BEEN CRITICIZING PARTY LEADER LYNCH AS BEING "TOO SOFT" ON NORTHERN

IRELAND. MUCH OF THIS TALK IS ALSO RELATED TO THE BYELECTION. SO FAR THE TALK HAS BEEN GUARDED AND SOMEWHAT RITUALISTIC, WITH THE OPPOSITION ATTACKING POST AND TELEGRAPH MINISTER CONOR CRUISE-O'BRIEN (LABOR) INSTEAD OF ATTACKING COSGRAVE DIRECTLY. COSGRAVE AND LYNCH ARE STUDIOUSLY AVOIDING THE ISSUE, THUS KEEPING UP A FACADE OF NONPARTISANSHIP. THE FACT IS, HOWEVER, THAT WITH THE FAILURE OF SUNNINGDALE AND THE APPARENT COLLAPSE OF THE CONVENTION NEITHER MAJOR PARTY HAS ANY POSITIVE POLICY AT ALL ON NORTHERN IRELAND. THEY SEEM TO BE WAITING TO SEE WHAT THE BRITISH WILL TRY NEXT. THE MOOD IS ONE OF WORRIED RESIGNATION. THE GOVERNMENT IS PARTICULARLY WORRIED ABOUT THE INCREASING VIOLENCE ALONG THE BORDER, WHICH NOT ONLY HAS THE POTENTIAL FOR GETTING OUT OF HAND BUT IS EMBARRASSING BECAUSE THE IRISH WILL STILL NOT ADMIT PUBLICLY THAT MARAUDERS OCCASIONALLY COME FROM THE SOUTH AND THUS IT IS HARD TO EXPLAIN TO THE PUBLIC WHY THE GOI IS NOT LOUDLY PROTESTING THE INCREASINGLY FREQUENT "VIOLATIONS" OF THE BORDER BY THE BRITISH ARMY. SEEN FROM DUBLIN, IT APPEARS THAT HMG IS MAKING SOME EFFORTS TO MINIMIZE THE GOI'S EMBARRASSMENT. THE BRITISH HAVE, FOR EXAMPLE, PUBLICLY APOLOGIZED FOR THE LATEST INCIDENT EVEN THOUGH THE FACTS ARE UNCLEAR. FOR ITS PART THE GOI SHOWS SOME UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEMS THE BRITISH HAVE WITH THE "LOYALISTS" AND HAS NOT MADE MUCH FUSS OVER THE USELESS EXERCISES.

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CISE OF BLOWING HOLES IN ROADS ALONG THE BORDERS. THERE HAS BEEN GOOD COMMUNICATION AND RESPONSIBLE RESTRAINT ON BOTH SIDES. BUT SUCH RESTRAINT DOES NOT SEEM TO HELP THE SITUATION, AND NORTHERN IRELAND THUS ADDS SUBSTANTIALLY TO THE GLOOM OF THE DEPUTIES IN THE DAIL. CURLEY

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